

USPS Provides Lighthouses Details

The U.S. Postal Service has announced that it will issue its New England Coastal Lighthouses set on July 13 and that the Official First of Issue site actually will be five different sites—at or near the locations of the five lighthouses. In addition, the Postal People have provided historical information on those lighthouses.

Each of the five new stamps features an original acrylic painting by Howard Koslow based on recent photographs of the lighthouses. In addition to many other stamp projects, Koslow has produced the art for the entire Lighthouses series: the five lighthouses in the 1990 stamp booklet; the Great Lakes Lighthouses stamps issued in 1995; the Southeastern Lighthouses stamps in 2003; the Pacific Lighthouses stamps in 2007; and the Gulf Coast Lighthouses stamps in 2009.

The five featured lighthouses, among the oldest in the United States, are as follows:

Portland Head

Maine's oldest lighthouse, Portland Head was established in 1791. The construction of the tower was among the first acts of the Lighthouse Establishment, a federal agency created in 1789. The original rubblestone lighthouse still stands and looks much as it did in the late 1800s.

The 80-foot lighthouse had two types of Fresnel lenses during its history, a second-order and a fourth-order. The lighthouse was automated in 1989, and a modern DCB-224 optic installed. A beautiful Victorian keepers' duplex, built on the station in 1891, now houses the Museum at Portland Head Light. The lighthouse has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 1973 and is owned and managed by the Town of Cape Elizabeth, Maine.

The tower and the keepers' house together are considered one of the most beautiful stations in the U.S., and they are among the most frequently photographed subjects in Maine.

Portsmouth Harbor

The first navigational aid in New Hampshire was established in Portsmouth Harbor, the state's only deep-water port. Although citizens had demanded a lighthouse as early as 1721, it was not until 50 years later that the Portsmouth Harbor's first beacon was lit. An iron lantern topped the 50-foot shingled tower; three copper lamps provided the light. The 1771 tower was replaced in 1804 by another tower constructed of wood, located some 100 yards to the south of the original site.

When the second wooden tower succumbed to deterioration, a new 48-foot tower of bolted cast-iron plates was built on its foundation. It was actually assembled inside the old structure, which was dismantled after construction.

Managed by the Friends of Portsmouth Harbor Lighthouses, the 1878 lighthouse still stands on the northeast point of Great Island on the Piscataqua River in New Castle. It retains its fourth-order Fresnel lens. The lighthouse was automated in 1960 and has been on the National Register of Historic Places since 2009.

Boston Harbor

Boston Harbor Light, North America's first true light station, was built in 1716 at the urging of the city's business community. Three

years later a cannon—America's first fog signal—was added to the light station. During the Revolutionary War, as British forces abandoned the area in 1776, they demolished the lighthouse by blowing it up.

A new rubblestone tower, 75-foot tall, replaced the destroyed lighthouse in 1783; it was raised an additional 14 feet in 1859, when its current second-order Fresnel lens was also installed. After large cracks appeared in the east wall in 1809, iron hoops were installed for support; aluminum bands replaced the corroded iron in 1973–74.

The lighthouse was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1964. Standing on Little Brewster Island within the Boston Harbor Islands National Recreational Area, it was the last lighthouse in the United States to be automated—in 1998—and is the only remaining American lighthouse to have a resident keeper employed by the federal government.

Point Judith

Located at the entrance to Narragansett Bay in Rhode Island, Point Judith Lighthouse guards a particularly dangerous area of the Atlantic. The point, which extends several miles into the Atlantic, has seen many shipwrecks, even after the addition of the lighthouse.

The first lighthouse built on the site, in 1810, was a wooden tower that toppled over in a storm five years later. A second tower, made of sturdier stone, was erected in 1816; its lamps and lenses were operated by clockwork mechanism powered by a 288-pound weight.

This 35-foot tower remained in service until 1857, when the current lighthouse was built. The octagonal tower, made from brownstone blocks, stands 51 feet high and boasts a fourth-order Fresnel lens.

Automated in 1954, the lighthouse underwent a major restoration in 2000 using blocks from the same area where the original stone was quarried. The lighthouse stands on the Coast Guard Station Point Judith and has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 1988.

New London Harbor

Connecticut's oldest and tallest lighthouse, New London Harbor Lighthouse, was originally established in 1761. Financed by a lottery held by the Connecticut colonial legislature, the first lighthouse was a 64-foot tower that included a wooden lantern.

The tower developed a crack and was replaced in 1801 by the present lighthouse. New London Harbor was one of the earliest American lighthouses with a flashing light, added in 1801 to distinguish it from the lights of nearby homes.

The octagonal brownstone structure is 89 feet high and retains its fourth-order Fresnel lens, which was installed in 1857. The lighthouse was automated in 1912, and the keeper's house was sold. In 1990 it was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Though the keeper's house is privately owned, the New London Maritime Society acquired the lighthouse in 2010.

